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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [GM](#)

SUBJECT: NRW Election Chessgame: Ruetters Sacrifices His Queen as  
Campaign Heats Up

1. (U) Summary: Juergen Ruetters, Minister-President (M-P) of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) forced his prot????g???? and the General-Secretary of the NRW Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Hendrik Wuest to resign his post February 22 after a scandal broke over the weekend involving the possible selling of appointments with the M-P to sponsors of the party for a set fee. The quick resignation came on the heels of growing accusations from the opposition parties that the CDU was selling access to the state's top ranking office holder. The affair comes at a most inopportune moment for the ruling CDU and its coalition partner the FDP, who face an uphill battle to be returned to power in the upcoming May 9 state parliament elections. The elections in NRW, the largest state in Germany, have been described as a "mini-Bundestag" election because they are the only state election in Germany in 2010 and could change the majority situation in the Bundesrat, the second chamber of parliament at the national level. Many political observers also see the election as a referendum on the recently elected CDU-FDP coalition on the Federal level in Berlin. End Summary.

2. (U) Over the weekend, media reports confirmed that the NRW CDU had sent a letter to potential sponsors for their upcoming state convention to be held in March, offering one-on-one talks with M-P Ruetters if the sponsors donated between 8,000-20,000 Euro. Ruetters immediately denied any knowledge of the fundraising quid pro quo scheme and publicly ordered Wuest to put a halt to the plan. Wuest quickly apologized to Ruetters on Sunday, February 21, but that was not enough. On February 22, after another meeting with the Minister-President, Wuest announced his resignation as the party's General-Secretary, but confirmed that he would not resign his seat in the state parliament, which he has held since 2005.

3. (U) After the scandal broke, opposition parties seized on the potential misuse of office, and started calling for not only the resignation of Wuest, the architect of the CDU election campaign, but also for the resignation of M-P Ruetters, should it turn that he -- contrary to his affirmations -- had prior knowledge of this fundraising scheme. NRW Social Democratic Party (SPD) Secretary-General Michael Groschek called this type of fundraising "scandalous" and "beyond the limits of our political culture." Greens Landtag floor leader Sylvia Loehrmann deplored that the "CDU and Ruetters have damaged the office of Minister-President by marketing it." The sharpest criticism came from the national level: SPD Bundestag chief whip Thomas Oppermann referred to the CDU plans as "political prostitution and corruption" and as "destroying democracy."

4. (SBU) Comment: The scandal marks a turning point in the NRW election campaign. The CDU had hoped to cruise to victory with their current coalition partners, the FDP, but with polls showing decreasing support for the FDP and stagnant or decreasing support for the CDU, a victory for the CDU-FDP coalition is not at all certain. The quick resignation of Wuest, considered by many observers as one of the most promising younger leaders in the NRW CDU, is a quick attempt at damage control. As the strategic mind and the main organizer of the CDU's campaign, Wuest's departure represents not just the sacrifice of a pawn, but really a sacrifice

of the queen to save the king and is crippling for Ruetters' quest for reelection as Minister-President, as it tarnishes Ruetters himself. Most damaging for Ruetters is the accusation that he, who styles himself as NRW's labor leader and champion of the man on the street, might have been willing to lend his ear to rich people for money. It is much too early to assess the full impact of this affair, but it is fair to say that if Ruetters should lose the election, this was the affair that broke his neck. End comment.

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